

LHD Investigation Steps For Outbreaks in Large Meat/Food Processing Plants

Outbreaks in food and meat processing plants in North Carolina are a high priority. The investigation and implementation of control measures are complicated and require cooperation among different agencies, counties, healthcare providers, community group and the facility. This guidance is intended to provide a general overview of some of the activities that LHDs will be involved with.

Establish Your Team

1. Assemble your Local Health Department (LHD) team and assign an investigation lead
2. Identify your contacts the Division of Public Health (DPH)
 - a. Technical Assistance and Training Program (TATP) nurse can assist with this
3. Identify community resources
 - a. Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC)
 - b. Community organizations
4. Establish contacts at the facility (NC Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services can be helpful if there are issues establishing a reliable contact at the facility – make request through your DPH contacts)
 - a. For information on ill employees: Employee health/Occupational health/HR
 - b. Management contacts

Initial Contact with the Facility

- Provide available COVID19 Guidelines:
 - NC guidance: <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/public-health/covid19/covid-19-guidance#businesses>
 - CDC and OSHA: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/meat-poultry-processing-workers-employers.html>
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/critical-workers/implementing-safety-practices.html>
 - CDC Testing Strategy for Coronavirus (COVID-19) in High-Density Critical Infrastructure Workplaces after a COVID-19 Case is Identified: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/worker-safety-support/hd-testing.html>
- Gather initial information on employees (see checklist for more detail). This is a significant request for information, and it may take several calls/meetings to get what is needed.
 - Collect basic information about facility.
 - Collect initial information on the number of positive and ill employees in the facility.
 - Request use of a linelist to track positive employees in a format that allows for sharing information with the LHD.
 - Determine their sick policy.
 - Discuss possible testing strategies. Consider the CDC Testing Strategy recommendations.
 - Determine testing capacity.
 - Review screening and exclusion practices.
 - Review employee outreach and education.
 - Review plan for contact tracing in the facility.
- Set schedule/method for regular meetings
 - Daily meetings will likely be required initially but frequency should reflect need.
 - Set up expectations for what information you would like to have updated on a regular basis.

Case Investigations

- Investigate cases in your jurisdiction and complete NCEDSS event
 - Minimal data points needed
 - Demographic information
 - Onset date

- Hospitalization
- Outcome – died/survived
- Lab Results
- Link case event to outbreak event
- For cases in your jurisdiction that are part of an outbreak in another jurisdiction
 - Link the NCEDSS event to the outbreak
 - Share the event with the jurisdiction investigating the outbreak
 - Email the CD nurse in the county with the outbreak to let them know there is a new case

Contact Tracing - Responsibility

- The facility is responsible for contact tracing within the workplace
 - Facility should report
 - # contacts
 - # contact assessed and given monitoring instructions
 - # symptomatic contacts identified
 - # contacts tested
- LHDs are responsible for contract tracing in the community.
 - Each jurisdiction is responsible for contact tracing for cases that live in their jurisdiction, even if the facility is in a different jurisdiction.

Contact Tracing - Procedure

- Identify household and community contacts
See contact tracing information: <https://epi.dph.ncdhhs.gov/cd/lhds/manuals/cd/coronavirus.html>
 - Symptomatic contacts
 - Exclude from work and provide home isolation guidance
 - Special emphasis must be given for employees that live together or with family. Employees must understand the need to self-isolate.
 - Facilitate the collection of specimens for COVID-19 testing
 - Primary care provider
 - FQHC facility
 - LHD can collect and submit to SLPH – discuss with epi or lab if considering testing a large number of people
 - Criteria for testing broadened
 - Anyone with symptoms suggestive of COVID-19
 - Close contacts of known positive cases, regardless of symptoms
 - People with higher risk of exposure or higher risk of severe disease who believe they may have been exposed to COVID-19
 - includes employees of most food processing facilities
 - Asymptomatic contacts who are essential employees
 - If possible, asymptomatic contacts should be excluded from work for 14 days after their last exposure
 - If needed for continuity of operations, asymptomatic contacts can be allowed to work if they can be monitored and practice appropriate social distancing.
 - Symptom monitoring must occur with report to employee health or occupational health office at the facility where they work
 - Can work if use face mask and social distance at work
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/Essential-Critical-Workers_Dos-and-Donts.pdf

- If become symptomatic then exclude from work and collect specimen for testing
- Safety Practices for contacts: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/critical-workers/implementing-safety-practices.html?utm_campaign=What%20to%20Do%20If%20You%20Have%20COVID-19%20Confirmed%20Positive%20or%20Exposed%20Workers&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Eloqua.

Assess Needs of Employees Requiring Isolation

- Is housing adequate for isolation
- Other support needed

Resources to fill needs:

- NCCARE360. <https://nccare360.org/>
- Farmworker Health, Office of Rural Health
- Community Groups
- Facility may provide temporary housing
- Non-congregate housing assistance <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/public-health/covid19/assistance/non-congregate-sheltering>
- Call 2-1-1 for specific local resources
- Contact local emergency management with unmet needs and details <https://www.ncdps.gov/emergency-management/em-community/directories/counties>

Investigation of the Facility

- National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) is available to do a virtual assessment of the facility
- NC Strike Team available for assistance
 - Technical support
 - On-site investigation if needed
 - Requires permission from facility for maximum effect

Additional Resources

- Educational resources for workers at farms and meat/food processing plants: <https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/information/business/workers-farms-and-meat-plants#guidance>
- Criteria to discontinue home isolation: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/disposition-in-home-patients.html>
- Most Migrant and Community Health Centers may be able to provide telehealth evaluation, and some can provide COVID-19 testing at sliding scale fees <https://www.ncfhp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/2020-NCFHP-and-MHC-Map.pdf>.
- Disposition of food: <https://www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/what-do-if-you-have-covid-19-confirmed-positive-or-exposed-workers-your-food-production-storage-or>. There is no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19 regardless of the status of the worker in a plant. The FDA does not anticipate that food products will need to be recalled or be withdrawn from the market should a person that works on a farm or in a food facility test positive for COVID-19.